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SUBJECT: BAHAMAS APPLAUDS HISTORIC US ELECTION RESULT

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: The Bahamian public, press and government greeted the U.S. presidential election outcome with joy and satisfaction at the historic success of an African-American candidate and admiration for the U.S. and the American democratic process. Optimism marked the view of the potential impact of Obama administration policies on The Bahamas and the Caribbean. Calculations of national interest took a back seat to emotional affinity and hope for a better future, even within the government and foreign policy establishment. Fevered anticipation of an Obama victory culminated with an outpouring of positive media commentary in the election aftermath. Bahamians saw the outcome, essentially, as a vindication of the American dream and a testament to the strength of American democracy. The resounding electoral result amounted to a public diplomacy bonanza in an already staunchly pro-American country. END SUMMARY.

PRESS: "OBAMA FEVER GRIPS BAHAMAS"

¶2. (U) A popular daily newspaper summed up the atmosphere of anticipation in a November 4 headline: "Obama Fever Grips Bahamas". In a city awash with "Bahama for Obama" bumper stickers, T-shirts, and other paraphernalia normally associated with a U.S. election campaign, hawked for months in central Nassau, s tourist district, Bahamians gathered around television sets in homes, bars, and even MacDonald, s restaurants to watch election returns. Ordinary Bahamians identified with and supported Senator Barack Obama overwhelmingly throughout the campaign. By all accounts, they viewed him as a symbol of African-American success and supported his candidacy without regard for concrete issues that might impact The Bahamas under his administration. These sentiments were mirrored among highly-placed government officials and persons of influence from all sectors of society, some of whom gathered at the Ambassador, s residence for an election watch to share their thoughts and reactions with Embassy officers.

FOR BAHAMIANS -- EMOTION TRUMPS ISSUES

¶3. (U) Ambassador Siegel, s election watch drew a representative cross-section of elite Bahamian society, including figures from incumbent and opposition politics, press and electronic media, private business, academia, and government finance. Most invitees, notably, regretted in order to celebrate the evening in more intimate settings, with family, friends, and colleagues, in anticipation of a historic victory by Senator Obama. Those who attended were unanimous in the view that the personal history and personality of the candidate trumped all other considerations in the minds of Bahamians and led to the unprecedented emotional investment in the outcome.

¶4. (U) The Embassy, s "mock vote" went in favor of the Democratic candidate, as expected, by a margin of nearly 4-to-1, which probably under-stated the level of support in

Bahamian society as a whole. Most attendees commented that Bahamians followed this U.S. election cycle more intensely and closely than any in memory, again largely due to the candidacy of an African-American. They felt that the vast majority supported Senator Obama without regard to particular issues that might move the ordinary American voter, such as the economy, or which might potentially impact The Bahamas under an Obama administration, such as trade.

FEW RESERVATIONS, OPTIMISTIC OUTLOOK

15. (U) One high-ranking government official, a rare McCain supporter, commented that only a handful of colleagues supported the Republican candidate. This official alone cited a cost-benefit analysis of the potential impacts of the candidates, economic policies on the off-shore financial sector in The Bahamas, the second most important industry after tourism, as rationale for supporting Senator McCain. A high official in the Central Bank, however, dismissed concerns about an Obama administration's unfavorable policies toward off-shore banking as unfounded due to the relative lack of U.S. participation in this sector. No other specific issue of contention arose, however, as informed interlocutors felt that the bilateral relationship was too strong and well-grounded to be much affected by a new administration of either stripe.

16. (U) A Ministry of Foreign Affairs official cited mixed emotions about Senator Obama on different grounds: religious and cultural disagreements with various planks in the Democratic Party platform, such as support for abortion or

NASSAU 00000776 002 OF 002

gay rights. This official still came down on the side of the Democratic candidate, ultimately, due to the transcendent nature of the candidacy of an African-American and his greater emphasis on social issues. In the avowedly Christian and extremely socially conservative Bahamas, it is notable that influential religious leaders who expressed support for Senator Obama made no mention of similar cultural or religious concerns, rather joining the mainstream of pro-Obama opinion in celebrating a historic victory over racism and the legacy of slavery. Another MFA official expressed the hope that Senator Obama's mixed racial background would provide insight into and affinity with the Caribbean countries and prove an advantage for the region as a whole.

PRESS REACTION -- POSITIVE VIEWS FOR PRESIDENT-ELECT, U.S.

17. (U) Most other observers in attendance, including prominent media personalities, high representatives of both the incumbent and opposition parties, and academics, were far less conflicted. They expressed almost unreserved support for and optimism about the Democratic candidate, his chances for success as President, whether in economics or foreign policy, and how his victory could positively affect the U.S., the Caribbean, and the world at large. Attendees also emphasized their admiration for the election process in the U.S. as it was playing out on television screens, especially favorably noting Senator McCain's concession speech.

18. (U) Press and radio reactions November 5 reflected the overwhelmingly positive views of the outcome, of President-Elect Obama, and the U.S. democratic system:

--The Tribune daily (circulation 15,000) led with the headline: "Obama victory: Bahamians celebrate first presidential triumph for an African-American candidate".

--The Nassau Guardian daily (circulation 15,000): "Change has come, -- A new dawn: Obama sweeps to victory as first black president".

--In its morning news broadcast, the national radio station ZNS reported on Bahamian-American supporters of President-Elect Obama celebrating his historic victory. ZNS also carried Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Symonette's expression of congratulations to the President-Elect and conviction that the GCOB's excellent relations with the U.S. would be unaffected by the change in administration.

--The Bahama Journal daily's (circulation 7,500) frontpage headline read simply "Obama is the President", and carried another story quoting Embassy spokesman Jeff Dubel: "An Election of 'Firsts'". A page 2 commentary took a more skeptical view of an Obama administration due to the potential negative impact on the financial sector: "Obama Policies 'A Threat'".

--The Nassau Guardian daily also carried the sober foreign policy commentary of a former Central Bank governor, James Smith, titled: "Caribbean region not a priority for the U.S."

PRIME MINISTER CONGRATULATES PRESIDENT-ELECT

19. (U) Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham issued a statement of congratulations to the President-Elect "on his historic victory at the polls yesterday" on behalf of the government and people of The Bahamas. Summing up the widely-held Bahamian perspective, Ingraham wrote: "The success of Senator Obama's extraordinary campaign will go a long way in shattering racial stereotypes in America. It is a quintessential American story of victory over tremendous odds." He said the "victory for America" will "strengthen the special place that America holds in the minds and hearts of freedom-loving people everywhere." The statement concluded: "And so we look forward to a continuation of this special relationship that has long existed between our two countries."

SIEGEL